

Teach Us to Pray, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Intercession: Praying for Others

1 Timothy 2:1–8; James 5:13–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson turns prayer outward toward others, and it teaches the privilege and power of intercession. The doctrine at stake is twofold. First, the missionary heart of God: he “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), and intercession aligns us with that desire. Tied to it is the recurring truth of the study, that there is one God and one mediator, Christ Jesus, so our prayers for others are offered through him. Second, the real efficacy of prayer: James insists that “the prayer of a righteous person has great power” (James 5:16), and that God genuinely acts in response to the prayers of his people, even ordinary people like Elijah. The teacher’s aim is to convince the class that praying for others is neither a formality nor wasted breath, but a God-ordained means by which he works.

Two areas call for careful handling. First, James 5:14-16 on praying for the sick must be taught without drifting into a guarantee of healing on demand. “The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” is a real promise of God’s hearing and power, but it is offered within the same biblical framework the whole study upholds: God answers in his wisdom and will, sometimes with healing and sometimes not (recall Paul’s own thorn, 2 Corinthians 12). This is intercession in faith, not a technique that obligates God, and not prosperity teaching. Second, 1 Timothy 2:8, “the men should pray” in the assembly, sits in a context (vv. 8-15) about conduct in the gathered church and the distinct roles of men and women. Teach it plainly and respectfully: in the assembly, leading public prayer is the responsibility of the men, consistent with the New Testament pattern in which the roles of pastor, elder, and teacher over the gathered church belong to qualified men, and women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in that setting. At the same time, affirm with equal clarity that intercession itself is the calling and privilege of every Christian, men and women alike, and that Scripture honors the powerful prayers of women throughout.

The formational aim is to enlarge hearts that have shrunk to the size of their own concerns. Most believers pray mostly for themselves and a small circle. This lesson calls them to carry others, including the lost, the sick, fellow believers, and even those they find hard to love, to the throne of grace. The goal is that students leave with a specific, enlarged burden: real names to pray for, a renewed confidence that their prayers matter, and a fresh sense that intercession is one of the great works God has given his people to do for one another.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul urges “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Why does Paul make intercession for all people, including governing authorities, a priority for the church, and what does this teach us about the reach of Christian prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the sweep of Paul’s exhortation. He stacks up four words, supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, to underline how central this is, and then sets the widest possible scope: “for all people,” specifically including “kings and all who are in high positions.” The first thing to notice is the breadth. Christian prayer is not meant to stay small and self-focused; it reaches outward to all kinds of people.

Highlight the inclusion of rulers, which would have been striking to Paul’s first readers, since the emperor was no friend of the church. Paul tells believers to pray for the very authorities who might persecute them. This rules out the idea that we only pray for people we like or agree with. Intercession follows the wide love of God, not the narrow boundaries of our preferences.

Note the stated aim in verse 2: “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Praying for those in authority is partly so that the church may have the freedom and peace to live out its faith and spread the gospel. Intercession is tied to the mission and wellbeing of God’s people, not merely to private concerns.

Apply it to the class. If our prayers reveal the reach of our love, then learning to pray for all people, including rulers and even opponents, stretches our hearts toward the heart of God. Intercession is training in a love larger than our natural circle.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The wide scope of Christian prayer: “for all people” (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Praying even for governing authorities, including those hostile to the faith
- Intercession following the wide love of God rather than our preferences
- Prayer for rulers tied to the peace, godliness, and mission of the church (v. 2)
- Intercession as training in a love larger than our natural circle

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Paul specifically includes kings and authorities in our prayers?
- What does it say about Christian prayer that it reaches even to opponents?
- How does praying for all people stretch our hearts toward God’s heart?

Question 2

Student Question:

Look honestly at who is, and is not, on your prayer list. Are there people, perhaps those who have wronged you or leaders you strongly disagree with, that you almost never pray for? What would it look like this week to begin interceding for someone you have left off your list?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to audit their prayer lists honestly. Most of us pray readily for those we love and rarely, if ever, for those who have hurt us or for leaders we oppose. Help the class notice the gaps without defensiveness; the gaps are usually a map of where our love has limits.

Connect it to Jesus' command to pray for our enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:44). Praying for someone is one of the most reliable ways to begin to love them; it is hard to keep resenting a person you regularly carry to God. Intercession can soften a hardened heart, often the heart of the one praying.

Prescribe a concrete step: choose one person currently absent from their prayers, an opponent, an estranged relative, a leader they dislike, and begin praying for them by name this week, sincerely seeking their good. Warn them gently that this prayer tends to change the one who prays it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Auditing our prayer lists to see the reach of our love
- The tendency to pray only for those we already love
- Praying for enemies and opponents as Jesus commands (Matthew 5:44)
- Intercession as a means of softening our own hearts toward others

Discussion Prompts

- Who is conspicuously absent from your prayers, and why?
- How might praying for someone begin to change the way you feel about them?
- Who will you start interceding for this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul grounds intercession in God's heart: he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," for "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:4-5). How does God's desire for all to be saved, and the truth that Christ alone is mediator, shape the way we pray for those who are lost?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question anchors intercession in the heart of God revealed in verses 4-5. God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." When we pray for the salvation

of others, we are not trying to talk a reluctant God into caring; we are joining a desire that already burns in his heart. That should embolden our prayers for the lost enormously.

Tie in the mediator, since this is the same truth that anchored Lesson 3. “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Our prayers for the lost are offered through this one mediator, and the salvation we pray for comes only through him. There is one way for the people we love to be saved, and his name is Jesus. This gives both urgency and clarity to evangelistic prayer.

Address how God’s desire that all be saved fits with human response. God genuinely desires the salvation of all and has provided one Savior for all; the call of the gospel is real and universal, and people are truly able to respond. So we pray, and we also speak, and we trust God to work through both. Intercession for the lost and the sharing of the gospel belong together; prayer is not a substitute for witness, nor witness for prayer.

Apply it. Praying for the lost is some of the most God-aligned praying we can do. Encourage the class to pray boldly for specific people’s salvation, confident that they are asking for the very thing God desires, while remembering that those people must still hear, believe, and respond to the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s desire that all people be saved as the ground of evangelistic prayer (1 Timothy 2:4)
- One God and one mediator, Christ Jesus: salvation prayed for and given through him alone (v. 5)
- The universal, genuine gospel call and the real ability of people to respond
- Prayer for the lost and the sharing of the gospel belonging together
- Boldness in praying for salvation, aligned with God’s own desire

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing God desires all to be saved change the way you pray for the lost?
- Why does it matter that there is only one mediator when we pray for others’ salvation?
- How do prayer and actually sharing the gospel work together?

Question 4

Student Question:

It is easy to talk about evangelism and rarely pray for specific lost people by name. Who are the people in your life who do not know Christ, and what would it mean to begin praying for them regularly and specifically, asking God to draw them to himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes evangelistic prayer concrete and personal. It is easy to affirm that we should pray for the lost in general and never pray for an actual person by name. Help students move from the abstract to the specific: who, in their real life, does not know Christ?

Encourage them to build a short, specific list, family members, coworkers, neighbors, friends, and to begin praying for each by name, asking God to draw them, to open their hearts, to bring people and circumstances that point them to Christ. Specificity turns vague concern into real intercession.

Add the dimension of readiness. Praying for the lost often makes us more alert and willing to speak when the opportunity comes; the prayer and the witness reinforce each other. Invite students to ask God not only to save these people but to use them, the pray-ers, as part of the answer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from praying for the lost in general to praying for specific people by name
- Building a concrete list of those who do not yet know Christ
- Asking God to draw them and open their hearts
- Prayer for the lost increasing our readiness to witness

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the specific people in your life who do not know Christ?
- What would it look like to pray for them regularly and by name?
- How might praying for them make you more ready to speak when the moment comes?

Question 5

Student Question:

James writes, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him... And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” (James 5:14-15). What does this passage teach about praying for the sick, the role of the elders and the church family, and how should we understand “the prayer of faith” without turning it into a guarantee of healing on demand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to James 5:14-15 on praying for the sick, and teach it with both confidence and care. James directs the sick believer to call the elders, who pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. Notice the communal shape: the sick person reaches out, and the spiritual leaders of the church come to pray. Healing prayer is set within the life of the church family, not treated as a private transaction or a performance by a celebrity healer.

Explain the elements. The anointing with oil was a customary act associated with care and consecration; the power is not in the oil but in “the name of the Lord.” The emphasis falls on prayer offered in faith and on the Lord who raises up. This is the church doing what the church is meant to do: bearing one another’s burdens and bringing the suffering to God.

Handle “the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” carefully. This is a genuine promise of God’s hearing and power; James means us to pray with real expectancy. But it must be read within the whole counsel of Scripture, which never presents prayer as a guarantee of healing on demand. God remains free and wise: he healed many, and he also left Paul’s thorn in place after three earnest prayers, answering instead, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). So we pray for the sick boldly and expectantly, and we entrust the outcome to a good and wise God, who sometimes heals now, sometimes heals later, and always works for the good of his people. Note too that James adds, “if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven,” linking physical and spiritual care without teaching that all sickness is the result of personal sin.

Apply it to the class. The lesson here is to actually pray for the sick, to involve the church and its elders, and to do so in faith without falling into the error that enough faith forces God’s hand. This guards against both a faithless prayerlessness and a prosperity-style demand for healing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Praying for the sick within the church family, calling the elders (James 5:14)
- Anointing with oil and prayer in the name of the Lord; the power in the Lord, not the oil
- “The prayer of faith” as expectant prayer, not a guarantee of healing on demand
- God’s freedom and wisdom in healing (Paul’s thorn, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9)
- Physical and spiritual care joined, without teaching that all sickness is from personal sin
- A guard against both prayerlessness and prosperity-style demands for healing

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that James sets prayer for the sick within the church and its elders?
- How do we pray for healing in faith without treating it as a guarantee?
- How does Paul’s thorn help us understand unanswered prayers for healing?

Question 6

Student Question:

James says, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). How well do you let other believers into your struggles so they can pray for you, and how faithfully do you pray for them? What keeps us from this kind of honest, mutual intercession?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses James 5:16, “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another,” into the student’s actual relationships. It calls for two things many of us avoid: letting others see our struggles, and faithfully carrying theirs. Help the class feel the vulnerability and the gift of mutual intercession.

Name the barriers honestly: pride, fear of judgment, the desire to appear to have it together, and a culture of privacy that keeps church relationships shallow. James envisions a community where believers know one another well enough to confess and pray specifically. That requires trust and humility.

Encourage a concrete move toward this: identify one trusted believer with whom they could share a real struggle and ask for prayer, and commit to praying faithfully for that person in return. Even one such relationship can transform a person’s experience of the church from performance to genuine fellowship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mutual confession and prayer as a mark of real Christian fellowship (James 5:16)
- Barriers to honesty: pride, fear of judgment, the desire to appear fine
- Letting others into our struggles and faithfully carrying theirs
- Moving church relationships from performance to genuine fellowship

Discussion Prompts

- How freely do you let other believers into your real struggles?
- What keeps us from honest, mutual confession and prayer?
- Who is one person you could begin praying with and for this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

James declares, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working,” and points to Elijah, “a man with a nature like ours,” whose prayers stopped and started the rain (James 5:16-18). What does this teach us about the real effectiveness of intercession, and how does Elijah’s example encourage ordinary believers that their prayers for others actually matter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes up the great encouragement of James 5:16-18: “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James wants us to believe that intercession actually accomplishes something, that God genuinely acts in response to the prayers of his people. This is a sober and thrilling truth: God has chosen to work through prayer.

Unpack “righteous person.” James is not describing a spiritual elite whose prayers alone count. He immediately points to Elijah as “a man with a nature like ours”, an ordinary, flawed human being. The “righteous” are simply those made right with God and walking with him, which describes every faithful believer. This democratizes powerful prayer; it is not reserved for the spiritually famous.

Use the Elijah example as James intends, to encourage ordinary intercessors. Elijah prayed and the rain stopped; he prayed again and it returned. James’s point is not that we can command the weather, but that the same God who heard Elijah hears us, and that a plain believer’s prayers can have enormous effect. If God worked through Elijah, who was “like us,” he can work through our prayers for the people we carry.

Guard the truth from distortion. “Great power” does not mean our prayers control God or guarantee our preferred outcome; it means God truly works through them according to his will. Hold together two things the class needs: real confidence that intercession matters and accomplishes much, and continued trust that God answers in his wisdom. Both are true, and both keep us praying.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real efficacy of intercession: “great power as it is working” (James 5:16)
- “Righteous” as ordinary faithful believers, not a spiritual elite
- Elijah, a man “with a nature like ours,” as encouragement to ordinary intercessors (vv. 17-18)
- God’s chosen ordinance of working through the prayers of his people
- Confidence that prayer accomplishes much, held with trust in God’s will

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that a righteous person’s prayer “has great power”?
- Why does James point to Elijah as someone “with a nature like ours”?
- How do we hold confidence that prayer works together with trust in God’s will?

Question 8

Student Question:

Many of us pray for others half-heartedly because we doubt it makes any difference. Where have you grown discouraged or slack in praying for someone, and how might James’s promise that a righteous person’s prayer “has great power” renew your persistence in interceding for them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the discouragement that quietly erodes our intercession. Many of us have prayed for someone for a long time with no visible result and have slowly gone slack,

praying less and expecting less. Help the class name where that has happened and treat it with compassion; long intercession is genuinely hard.

Apply James's promise as fuel for perseverance. If a righteous person's prayer has great power, then our long, unseen prayers for others are not wasted; they are at work even when we see nothing. Much of intercession's effect is hidden, and the answer may come long after the praying, as it often does for parents praying for children.

Encourage renewed persistence with surrender. Invite students to take up again a person they had grown weary of praying for, and to recommit to faithful intercession, trusting God with the timing and the outcome. Remind them that they may be closer to an answer than they know, and that faithfulness in prayer is itself pleasing to God regardless of visible results.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discouragement and slackening in long intercession
- James's promise as fuel for persevering prayer
- The often-hidden and delayed effect of intercessory prayer
- Renewed persistence held together with trust in God's timing

Discussion Prompts

- For whom have you grown discouraged or slack in praying?
- How does the promise that prayer "has great power" renew your persistence?
- Whom will you recommit to interceding for, trusting God with the outcome?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul writes, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (1 Timothy 2:8), as he gives instruction about prayer in the gathered church. What does this verse teach about who leads public prayer in the assembly and about the holiness and unity required of those who pray, and how do we honor the New Testament pattern for the distinct roles of men and women in the assembly while affirming that every Christian, man and woman, is called to a rich life of intercession?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinally distinctive block of the lesson, and it should be taught plainly, warmly, and from the text. Paul writes, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (1 Timothy 2:8). The setting is the conduct of the gathered church; Paul is giving instruction about prayer in the assembly, and the verses that follow (vv. 9-15) continue to address the distinct roles of men and women in that setting. Note that the word

translated “men” here is the specific term for males, not the general word for people used earlier in the chapter.

Draw the first point: in the assembly, leading the church in public prayer is the responsibility of the men. This is consistent with the wider New Testament pattern, in which the roles of pastor, elder, and teacher over the gathered church are given to qualified men, and in which women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in that setting (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Teach this as the church’s glad submission to the apostolic pattern, not as a statement about the worth or giftedness of women, which Scripture everywhere honors. Present it without apology and without harshness; it is part of God’s good order for his church.

Draw the second point from the same verse, which is easy to overlook: those who lead in prayer must do so “lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.” The manner and heart of the one praying matter. Public prayer is to flow from holy lives and from unity, not from hands stained by sin or hearts full of conflict. A divided, angry, or hypocritical heart hinders prayer (compare 1 Peter 3:7). This is a searching word for the men who lead: holiness and peace are prerequisites, not optional extras.

Then affirm, with equal clarity and warmth, the other half of the truth, so no one mishears the lesson. The restriction concerns who leads public prayer and teaching in the mixed assembly; it does not restrict the privilege and calling of intercession, which belongs fully to every Christian, women and men alike. Scripture is full of women who prayed mightily, Hannah, Mary, Anna, the women in the upper room, and women whose homes and hands sustained the church. Every believer in your class, regardless of gender, is called to a rich, bold, powerful life of intercession in private, in the family, and in appropriate settings. Send the class away clear on the pattern for the assembly and equally clear that the door to intercession stands wide open to them all.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 1 Timothy 2:8 set in its context of conduct in the gathered assembly (vv. 8-15)
- Leading public prayer in the assembly as the responsibility of the men (the specific term for males)
- The New Testament pattern: pastor, elder, and teacher over the assembly given to qualified men; women not to teach or have authority over men in that setting (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35)
- Holiness and unity required of those who lead in prayer: “holy hands without anger or quarreling”
- Intercession itself as the calling and privilege of every Christian, women and men alike
- The honored example of praying women throughout Scripture (Hannah, Mary, Anna, and others)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the setting Paul is addressing, and how does that help us read “the men should pray”?
- What does “lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” require of those who lead in prayer?
- How do we honor the pattern for the assembly while affirming that intercession is the calling of every Christian?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across 1 Timothy 2:1-8 and James 5:13-18, with their call to pray for all people, their confidence in God’s desire to save, and their assurance that the prayers of God’s people have great power. Name one person or group you will commit to interceding for regularly, and one way this study is enlarging your prayers beyond yourself.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson into an enlarged, outward-facing prayer life. Trace the ground covered: prayer for all people, including rulers and opponents; prayer aligned with God’s desire to save the lost through the one mediator; prayer for the sick within the church family; honest mutual prayer among believers; and confidence that the prayers of ordinary righteous people accomplish much.

Press for a concrete commitment. Ask each student to name one person or group they will commit to interceding for regularly, and to identify how this study is enlarging their prayers beyond themselves. The goal is a real, named burden carried out of the room, not a general resolve to pray more.

Close by interceding together as a class, lifting up real names: the lost, the sick, the wandering, those in authority, one another. Let the class practice the very thing the lesson teaches, experiencing the joy and weight of carrying others to the throne of grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis: an enlarged, outward-facing life of intercession
- Prayer aligned with God’s heart for the lost, the sick, and one another
- Confidence that ordinary believers’ prayers for others accomplish much
- Spiritual formation: carrying real, named people to God beyond ourselves

Discussion Prompts

- Whom will you commit to interceding for regularly?
- How is this study enlarging your prayers beyond your own concerns?
- How can this class carry one another and the lost to God together?